



The Dragon's Challenge

By Captain Troy Paisley

An old infantryman once said that the expert infantryman badge (EIB) “is a mark of a man.” The coveted EIB is a uniform accomplishment that all infantrymen aspire to attain. The annual testing for this award is an event that not only provides soldiers an opportunity to excel but also allows commanders to emphasize unit individual training and team building. Many of the tasks that are evaluated during the EIB competition are common skills with which all soldiers should be familiar. Current events in the Middle East underline the need for all soldiers to repeatedly hone their basic combat skills such as weapons maintenance, call for fire, and land navigation. Therefore, all commanders, regardless of branch, should develop innovative ways to train these skills as an integral part of soldier readiness. The EIB competition can be a time-tested framework for combat support and combat service support leaders to use during their training year to augment common task training.

The Dragon's Challenge is an annual event that the 126th Chemical Battalion of the Nebraska Army National Guard uses to mirror the individual training framework of the EIB training and competition. Under the same concept established in the EIB competition and testing, the unit created an annual event that challenges soldiers but not unit resources. As a National Guard unit, this competition not only provides an opportunity to build unit cohesion but also allows the battalion to fulfill most of its annual common task testing

requirements. Moreover, to ensure training on chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive (CBRNE) skills, the battalion added a training twist that incorporates mission-oriented protective posture (MOPP) 4 and military occupational specialty (MOS) 74D (chemical operations specialist)



The high bars are part of the physical fitness aspect of the Dragon's Challenge.

skill level 1 tasks. The unit evaluated the following tasks during its three-day competition:

Day 1

- Complete the Army Physical Fitness Test.
- Employ and recover an M18A1 claymore mine.
- Assemble and perform a functions check for an M249 machine gun.
- Evaluate a casualty and prevent him from going into shock.
- Maintain an M16-series rifle.
- Prepare and submit a nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) 1 report.
- Prepare a chemical downwind message.
- Report information of potential intelligence value.

Day 2

- Complete the land navigation course.
- Identify topographic symbols on a map.
- Measure distance on a map.
- React to indirect fire in MOPP4.
- Prepare the improved chemical agent monitor (ICAM) for operation.

Day 3

- Use the protective mask with hood to prevent chemical contamination.
- Operate the M8A1 chemical agent alarm.
- Administer nerve agent antidote to a casualty.
- React to a nuclear hazard.
- Request the medical evacuation of a casualty.
- Call for and adjust indirect fire.
- Exchange MOPP gear.
- Identify chemical agents using M8 or M9 detector paper.
- Complete an obstacle course.

Unlike an EIB competition, the Dragon's Challenge was completed by four-member teams, which trained during the drills that were held just before the competition. Also unlike an EIB competition, the winning team members



A soldier adjusts a teammate's protective mask during the competition.

received Army Commendation Medals and a commander's coin, while the second-place team's members were awarded Army Achievement Medals. The operations officer and the full-time staff coordinated all resources and ensured that risk assessments were completed for each individual event. The Public Affairs Office covered the competition and provided media coverage.

An event such as the Dragon's Challenge can be a unit training and retention multiplier. The benefits that come from unit competitions that incorporate individual and MOS-specific training can be measured during unit evaluations, by the retention figures and, more importantly, on the battlefield. It is the responsibility of commanders to recognize new and innovative ways to retain and train today's soldiers. The Dragon's Challenge can be the "mark" of the chemical soldier.

Reference

STP 21-1-SMCT, *Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks Skill Level 1*, 31 August 2003.